



## Nurses Recognized for Excellence

**HOUSTON** – Recently, the Good Samaritan Foundation hosted its annual Excellence in Nursing Awards Luncheon. The event honors nurses who demonstrate a passion for the nursing profession and the desire to excel beyond expectations. Winners included seven nurses from the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC).

The Gold Award winner in the Clinical Practice in a Large Hospital category was Omana Simon D.N.P., R.N., F.N.P.-B.C. The Bronze Award winners in the Clinical Practice in a Large Hospital category were Arceli Katigbak M.S.N., R.N., C.C.R.N.; Sybill Kyle M.S.N., R.N.-B.C.; Beth Reimschuessel M.S.N., R.N.; and Laterrica Stringfellow M.S.N., R.N. The Bronze Award winner in the

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## Houston VA Builds New Hospital Wing

**HOUSTON** - A new hospital wing is in the works for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC). The project, scheduled to begin in September, will allow the Dermatology and Urology Clinics to relocate into much needed, larger spaces late next year.

“Our Veteran population is particularly susceptible to certain skin diseases,” said J. Kalavar, M.D., Medical Center Chief of Staff. “While on active duty, service members may be subject to extreme temperatures, extensive sun exposure, unsanitary living conditions, poor nutrition, combat wounds, chemical agents, and many other challenges known to contribute to skin disease.”

In addition, prostate cancer is the most common noncutaneous cancer among males. Although prostate cancer can be a slow-growing cancer, thousands of men die of the disease each year. Prostate cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in males. Veterans, particularly Vietnam Vets, have a higher than average incidence of

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Photo by Regi Sasser, AV Specialist

From left, Acting Medical Center Director Bryan T. Bayley, Urology Chief Donald P. Griffith, M.D., Facilities Management Executive Jeanette Butler, Construction Chief Mouris Ibrahim, and Dermatology Chief Theodore Rosen, M.D. look over the plans for the new hospital wing.

Houston is the only VA Medical Center to offer Veterans this cutting-edge medical device.

## Innovative Catheter-based Heart Valve Replacement Saves WWII Vet's Life



Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Communications Director

World War II Veteran Guy Pardue dances with Nursing Coordinator Maryrose Ruma through the halls of the Surgery Clinic at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

**HOUSTON** – The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) is the first VA, and the only one to date, to offer an innovative, artificial heart valve. Recently approved for commercial use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Sapien heart valve made by Edwards Lifesciences is implanted through a catheter as an alternative to open heart surgery for patients with inoperable aortic valve stenosis disease.

World War II Veteran Guy Pardue, 87, of Bastrop, La., received this transcatheter aortic valve on May 30, 2012. A member of the first Marine platoon to get the M1 rifle, Pardue, who served in the Pacific, landed at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii just days after the surprise attack by the Japanese against the United States naval base. He vividly remembers the nightmarish scene, with bodies of sailors still being pulled from the horribly damaged ships.

“In addition to his advanced age, Mr. Pardue suffers from congestive heart failure, carotid and coronary artery

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## Mental Health Wellness Fair

**Oct. 12, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.**  
**4th Floor Auditorium**

Information Booths, Giveaways, Seminars, and Free Food!  
See Page 8 for details.



One Combat Hero's journey to rediscover life:

# Retired Marine Uses Running for Therapy

**HOUSTON** - I joined the Marine Corps in 2001. As a young man, I was very physically active and enjoyed challenging myself. I loved to run, exercise, and play sports, all which were reasons that motivated me to join the Marine Corps and serve my county.

On January 27, 2005 in Iraq, I suffered a cerebral contusion, diaphragmatic rupture, scalp laceration, fracture femur, and lobe liver laceration as a result of a mortar attack. Unfortunately, my injuries and pain discouraged me and held me back from continuing my active lifestyle. I especially missed being able to run.

Through psychological counseling and medical assistance from the great doctors and nurses at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, I am proud to say that I have been able to revive my passion for running. This

mental and physical activity has been extremely therapeutic.

I have had a great experience with the Houston VA and received a lot of help from the doctors. In particular, Dr. Drew Helmer has been an amazing source of encouragement and great in assisting me with my medical needs. My Social Worker Cheryl Houlette has also been a big help in pointing me in the right direction when I need something at the VA. I think all the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) coordinators at the Post Deployment Clinic program do an excellent job.

With their encouragement, I got involved with the Team Red, White & Blue (Team RWB) organization. Team RWB's vision is to transform the way wounded Veterans are reintegrated into society when they return from combat.



Marine Veteran Eusebio Collazo ran the American Odyssey Relay Race 2012 from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania to Washington, D.C.

One of the organization's missions is to enrich the lives of wounded Veterans and their families through physical fitness.

They look to rebuild the body, give structure to life and bolster self-esteem, help to process experiences from Iraq/Afghanistan, and connect with people to run, bike, workout, and be active.

I have become very active in the organization. Team RWB assigned a great leader and mentor, Chris Widell, to serve as my advocate. Cpt. Widell is a Veteran of the Iraq war; and for that reason, I feel we can relate on many things due to our similar experiences.

Team RWB and Cpt. Widell invited me to be a part of the American Odyssey Relay Race 2012. The race began in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and ended in Washington, D.C. It was a great weekend that brought back many memories of my years in the military because of the comradery we shared. In 36 hours with very little sleep, we finished the 200-mile relay run.

I am proud of this accomplishment, pleased to be a part of Team RWB, and excited to be able to do something positive and therapeutic that involves my passion for running. ★ Marine Veteran Eusebio Collazo

A Word from the Director . . .

## Houston VA Provides Most Complex Care

**HOUSTON** - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) categorizes its health care facilities according to complexity levels determined on the characteristics of the patient population, clinical services complexity, intensive care unit and operative complexity, and education and research.

Facilities are classified into three levels with Level 1 representing the most complex facilities, Level 2 moderately complex facilities, and Level 3 the least complex facilities. Level 1 is further subdivided into categories 1a, 1b, and 1c.

This year, VA ranked the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) as the largest and most complex of all of its 153 medical centers.

In southeast Texas, the DeBakey VA and its seven outpatient clinics serve as the primary health care provider for more than 130,000 Veterans.

Awarded re-designation for Magnet Recognition for Excellence in Nursing Services, the MEDVAMC is home to a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinic; a Network Polytrauma Center; an award-winning Cardiac and General Surgery Program; Liver Transplant Center; VA Epilepsy and Cancer Centers of Excellence; VA Substance Abuse Disorder Quality Enhancement Research Initiative; Health Services Research & Development Center of Excellence; VA Rehabilitation Research of Excellence focusing on mild to moderate traumatic brain injury; Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center; and one of the VA's six Parkinson's Disease Research,

Education, and Clinical Centers.

Veterans from around the country are referred to the MEDVAMC for specialized diagnostic care, radiation therapy, minimally invasive procedures, and medical treatment including cardiovascular surgery, gastrointestinal endoscopy, nuclear medicine, ophthalmology, and treatment of spinal cord injury and diseases.

Including the outpatient clinics in Beaumont, Conroe, Galveston, Houston, Lufkin, Richmond, and Texas City, MEDVAMC outpatient clinics logged a staggering 1,279,525 outpatient visits in fiscal year 2011, more than doubling since 2001.

While these achievements are remarkable, we plan to provide more health care services to more Veterans in the future. Here are a few of the projects in the works.

We will open new 28,000 square feet outpatient clinics in both Katy and Tomball early next summer. Each VA-staffed facility will provide primary health care, mental health care, and women's specialty care in addition to laboratory, X-ray, telemedicine, teleretinal imaging, pharmacy, optometry, and audiology services.

VA has approved the use of land and resources for a second Fisher House at the MEDVAMC. Fisher Houses provide a comforting "home away from home" for families of seriously ill Veterans and active duty military personnel receiving specialized, lengthy medical care at VA or military hospitals. They are built using donations from local community businesses, foundations, organizations, and individuals. Those funds are then



Bryan T. Bayley, MHA, FACHE  
Acting Medical Center Director

matched by the Fisher House Foundation.

We are working closely with Air Force Veteran Richard E. Wainerdi, Ph.D., president and chief executive officer of Texas Medical Center, who is again spearheading the efforts to raise the necessary funds.

We continue to expand our mental health services by hiring an additional 33 clinicians and seven support personnel. This will bring our mental health staff to almost 500 employees. Stop by the Mental Health Fair on Oct. 12 in the 4th Floor Auditorium to learn more about why "Mental Health Care is Good Medicine."

In September, we begin vertical construction at the main hospital, building another wing on the second floor. This will allow us to relocate the Dermatology and Urology Clinics into new 8,000 and 7,000 square-foot spaces respectively by late next year.

While the MEDVAMC is a large and complex organization, we continuously strive to provide our Veterans with the best health care available anywhere. We are proud to serve our Nation's heroes! ★

## Infection: Don't Pass It On!

Wash your hands before eating, after using the restroom, after coughing or sneezing, after blowing your nose, before and after handling food, after being near someone sick, or after touching trash.



Help prevent flu this year!  
Get your Flu Shot today!



# 'Best Doctor' Selected as New Head of Surgery

**HOUSTON** – Samir S. Awad, M.D. has been selected as the new Operative Care Line executive of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC).

“With his strong leadership skills and personal drive, Sam has a proven track record of ensuring VA health care is more attentive to Veterans and their families; more performance-based and quality-driven; and better supported by medical education and research,” said Medical Center Chief of Staff J. Kalavar, M.D. “He is an extremely skilled surgeon, physician, teacher, and mentor.”

Listed as one of the best doctors in the nation in the field of surgical critical care medicine, Awad, has worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs since 2000. He is also an associate professor in the Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine

Awad has served as the Operative Care Line associate executive, chief of general surgery, and medical director of Surgical Intensive Care Unit at the MEDVAMC. He has worked on various South Central VA Health Care Network (VISN 16) initiatives and serves on the VA National Surgical Critical Care Advisory Board.

VA recently ranked the MEDVAMC as the most complex of all its medical facilities in terms of patient population, clinical services complexity, intensive care unit and operative complexity, and education and research. The MEDVAMC has been recognized for demonstrating consistently low observed-to-expected mortality rates in general surgery, all surgery, and all non-cardiac surgery during the last decade.

Awad is board certified by the American Board of Surgery and Surgical Critical Care. He attended medical school at Jefferson Medical College, Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia and completed his residency and fellowship at the University of Michigan Hospitals.

Awad's areas of specialty include liver, pancreas, and acute care surgery, as well as minimally invasive surgical procedures. He is a member of the Association for Academic Surgeons, the Society of University Surgeons, the American College of Surgeons, the Surgical Infection Society, and the Society for Critical Care Medicine. He has authored more than 100 peer-reviewed and invited publications, and is the recipient of numerous awards for surgical and research achievements. ★



Photo by Bobbi Gruener, Communications Director

Listed as one of the best doctors in the nation in the field of surgical critical care medicine, Samir S. Awad, M.D. examines Veteran Jimmy Ray Yancey during a recent appointment.




## Don't Be a No-Show.

Make sure the clinic clerk has your most up-to-date contact information when you check-in or call the Appointment Center at **713-794-8985** or **toll-free 1-800-639-5137**.

*Do you get nervous? Stressed? Have panic attacks or often feel sad?*

### BehTA-D Program

#### Behavioral Treatment for Anxiety and Depression in Individuals with Parkinson's Disease



If you have Parkinson's Disease and feel sad, nervous, anxious, or stressed, you may be interested in the BehTA-D program.

This program may help you enjoy your life and feel more in control. You will also be helping others by answering research questions.

**Find out more about BehTA-D:**  
**Call 713-791-1414 ext. 8818**

Offered by Baylor College of Medicine and Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Funded by the Parkinson's Study Group and Parkinson's Disease Foundation

# Participants Needed For Schizophrenia and Bipolar Illness Study

**HOUSTON** - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) is conducting research addressing the genetics of functional disability of individuals suffering with schizophrenia and bipolar illness.

Schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are chronic psychiatric diseases associated with considerable lifelong disability. Both conditions are known to have major genetic aspects with possible additional genetic contributions to their course and how they affect patients' lives.

“Genetic testing is a powerful tool to study any disorder, including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder,” said Rayan Al Jurdi, M.D., a MEDVAMC psychiatrist and an associate professor at Baylor College of Medicine. “However, a great many large-scale studies in this area have been curtailed because of the lack of study participants or lack of diversity in patients studied.”

The goal of the study is to conduct a gene-association analysis, comparing the DNA of 9,000 Veterans with schizophrenia and 9,000 Veterans with bipolar illness to the DNA of approximately 20,000 “mentally healthy” Veterans. This will help researchers discover genetic risk

factors related to these disorders.

Researchers also hope to further define functional capacity among patients with schizophrenia and bipolar illness using tests previously shown to be connected to real-world functional disability and to establish a specimen and data repository for future research.

Treatments for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder have improved in the last few years, but are still associated with relatively high rates of side effects.

“Genetic studies can also help researchers develop better treatments,” said Al Jurdi. “This is extremely important because suicide attempts and completed suicides are very common in these two populations.”

Veterans who qualify and participate in the study will receive \$60 compensation for their time and inconvenience.

If you are a Veteran who has been given a diagnosis of schizophrenia or bipolar illness, has received treatment for either of these illnesses at the MEDVAMC, and would like to participate in research to enhance understanding and treatment, please contact 713-791-1414, ext. 6911. ★

*Veterans who qualify and participate in the study will receive \$60 to compensate for their time.*



# \$1.9M in Grants to Help End Veteran Homelessness



Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Communications Director

**HOUSTON** – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the award of almost \$2 million in homeless prevention grants for Veterans in Harris, Ft. Bend, and Montgomery Counties.

The grants will serve approximately 620 homeless and at-risk Veteran families as part of the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. This award will serve Veteran families associated with The Salvation Army and Goodwill Industries of Houston, Inc., two of 151 community agencies in 49 states and the District of Columbia to receive a grant.

The Salvation Army, a Georgia Corporation, will receive \$988,729 and plans to serve approximately 220 participant households in Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties. Goodwill Industries of Houston, Inc. will receive \$1 million and plans to serve approximately 400 participant households in the Greater Houston Metro Area.

"We are committed to ending Veteran homelessness in America," said Bryan T. Bayley, M.H.A., F.A.C.H.E., acting director of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. "These grants will help the DeBakey VA and our community partners reach out and prevent at-risk Veterans from losing their homes."

Under the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program, VA awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that provide services to very low-income Veteran families living in — or transitioning to — permanent housing. Those community organizations provide a range of services that promote housing stability among eligible, very low income Veteran families.

Under the grants, homeless

providers will offer Veterans and their family members outreach, case management, assistance in obtaining VA benefits, and assistance in getting other public benefits. Community-based groups can offer temporary financial assistance on behalf of Veterans for rent payments, utility payments, security deposits, and moving costs.

Less than 15 percent of all homeless adults in the United States are Veterans. VA's efforts have contributed to a significant reduction in the number of homeless Veterans. Although many homeless Veterans served in combat and suffer from PTSD; at this time, epidemiologic studies do not suggest that there is a causal connection between military service, service in Vietnam, or exposure to combat and homelessness among Veterans. Rather than military service, family background, access to support from family and friends, and various personal characteristics seem to be the stronger indicators of risk of homelessness.

VA is the only federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to homeless Veterans. VA's major homeless programs constitute the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country, offering a wide array of services to help Veterans recover from homelessness and live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible.

If you know a Veteran who needs assistance, please call 1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838) or the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program at 713-794-7848. More information about VA's homeless programs is available at [www.va.gov/homeless](http://www.va.gov/homeless). Details about the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program are online at [www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp](http://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp). ★

*Domiciliary Assistant Carl Poole (left) and Peer Tech Specialist David Tillman raise the flag at the Houston Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans, a 40-bed VA domiciliary residence for homeless Veterans. VA's major homeless programs constitute the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country, offering a wide array of services to help Veterans recover from homelessness and live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible.*

## Houston VA Nurses Recognized for Excellence

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Clinical Practice in Hospice/Home Health Care/ Clinic/Other Setting category was Eron Wahid M.S.N., R.N.-B.C., C.N.L. The Bronze Award winner in the Nursing Education Clinician category was Charlotte Joubert M.S.N., R.N., C.E.N., C.N.L.

Founded in 1951, the Good Samaritan Foundation encourages nursing excellence through a variety of supported programs: assisting nursing students with the cost of their professional education, faculty development at nursing schools, continuing education for practicing nurses, innovative nursing research, and recognition and reward programs for nurses who demonstrate excellence in teaching and practice.

The Good Samaritan Foundation created the *Excellence in Nursing Awards* to recognize nursing's "best and

brightest." Nurses are nominated by their peers and selected by a distinguished committee of nursing leaders. Nominated nurses must exemplify excellence in teaching, mentoring, leadership, and service. By rewarding exemplary teachers and practitioners, Good Samaritan is helping retain quality nurses in this vital profession.

*The awards honor nurses who demonstrate a passion for the nursing profession.*

In January 2009, the American Nurses Credentialing Center, the nation's leading nursing credentialing organization, again granted its Magnet Recognition for Excellence in Nursing Services to the MEDVAMC.

The MEDVAMC was the second VA to achieve this recognition, and remains in the group of fellow Texas Medical Center facilities with Magnet status: Methodist Hospital, St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, and M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. ★



Photo by Regi Saxer, AV Specialist

*Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Omana Simon (middle), recognized with the Gold Award in the Clinical Practice in a Large Hospital category, talks with Marine Veteran Walter Ozment about Telehealth options along with Program Support Assistant Nicklette Knight.*



# Houston VA to Hire 40 New Employees as Part of Nationwide Boost Expanding VA Mental Health Staff



CBS Evening News Anchor Scott Pelley interviews Houston VA Psychologist Charity Hammond, Ph.D. about the Seeking Safety Veterans Support Group for an upcoming 60 Minutes story focusing on the Harris County Veterans Court. The Seeking Safety Program is just one of a wide variety of mental health services available at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

**HOUSTON** – The Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced it would add approximately 1,600 mental health clinicians as well as nearly 300 support staff to its existing workforce.

VA estimates that 33 clinicians and seven support personnel will be hired to support mental health operations at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. Funding was distributed to the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) and recruitment is underway.

VA has an existing workforce of 20,696 mental health staff that includes nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. Currently, almost 500 mental health clinicians and support staff work in southeast Texas supporting more than 132,000 Veterans.

With each additional mental health

care provider, a facility could potentially reach hundreds more Veterans battling mental illness. New providers will join a team that is already actively treating Veterans through individualized care, readjustment counseling, and immediate crisis services. Additional staff members also afford opportunities to look long-term and expand into cutting edge Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) research and to explore alternative therapies.

“As the tide of war recedes, we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to anticipate the needs of returning Veterans,” said Laura Marsh, M.D., Mental Health Care Line executive. “We know treatment for mental health issues works; we just have to convince Veterans to take advantage of the services we provide.”

Last year, VA provided quality, specialty mental health services to 1.3 million Veterans. Since 2009, VA has increased the mental health care budget by 39 percent. Since 2007, VA has seen a 35 percent increase in the number of Veterans receiving mental health services, and a 41 percent increase in mental health staff.

Returning combat Veterans can stop by the Post-Deployment Clinic located near the Spinal Cord Injury Entrance of the MEDVAMC or any of the seven VA outpatient clinics in southeast Texas for immediate medical and mental health care. To locate the nearest VA facility or Vet Center, visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).

Immediate help is also available at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net) or by calling the Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (push 1) or texting 838255. ★

## Ways to Make Healthy Eating Affordable

**HOUSTON** - There is a common misconception that eating healthy foods is expensive. But, cheap food is not necessarily unhealthy food.

Some of the cheapest, as well as most nutritious foods, are whole grains, vegetables, and beans. Dried beans are one of the best bang-for-the-buck ingredients around. A one-pound bag can cost about 40 cents. At the same time, one serving combined with rice or grain provides vitamins, minerals, and high fiber. Beans are good sources of the essential fatty acids and are the best plant source of protein.

In addition, healthy choices can be made when you are on a budget. Plan ahead by deciding on your menus for the week. This also prevents overspending on wasted foods you do not need.

Making a list and sticking to it will prevent buying foods you do not need. When you go shopping, it is important not to go hungry when everything looks good.

Stick to the perimeter of the store where fresh produce, meats, dairy products, and breads are located. Load your shopping cart with these foods before heading to the middle aisles where more processed and snack foods are.

Coupons are a great way to save money. But, make sure the product is something you actually need. Signing up for the store's reward card can also provide extra savings.

Purchasing store brand items or generic items can help cut food costs, because they are usually identical to brand name items. Brand name items are generally more expensive because of the added costs of advertising. Brand items are typically stocked at eye level, so look around for the cheaper store brand items.

Another great tip is to buy on sale and in bulk. Shop for sales on non-perishable items and other products that you use regularly. Buying in bulk can save you money; but, only if you are going to use the product before it spoils. And, it is important to compare unit prices which can be found on the shelf tag to determine which is cheaper.

Finally, when you get home from the grocery store, keep your foods safe in order to prevent waste. Use the older items before the newer foods. Another idea is to shop seasonally and locally. This supports local farmers and in-season, fresh produce is usually much cheaper.

In conclusion, you can eat healthy and nutritious foods while keeping your grocery budget low by being consistent, making good choices, and eating in moderation. For more information, contact a registered dietitian at 713-791-1414, ext. 6616/4295/3976. ★ Heather Duby, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern

### Veterans Crisis Line



1-800-273-8255  
PRESS 1

The Veterans Crisis Line is a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs resource that connects Veterans in crisis and their families with qualified, caring VA professionals through a confidential toll-free hotline and on-line chat.

### SPRINT

Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial

If you join the SPRINT Research Study, you will receive at no cost:

- ✓ Blood Pressure Medication(s)
- ✓ Physical Exams
- ✓ Lab Tests
- ✓ Memory Tests
- ✓ EKGs (Electrocardiograms)

You must be at least 50 years old; have high blood pressure, with systolic (upper) number of at least 130; and have no history of diabetes or stroke.

To learn more about this study, contact Cathy Anderson at 713-794-8912.

Supported by:





# Myths about Carbohydrates

**HOUSTON** - Carbohydrates, carbs for short, include simple and complex sugars that your body needs to use as fuel. Carbohydrates are your body's primary source of energy.

Simple sugars, sometimes called "bad" carbs, include table sugar, honey, fruit, candy, and other desserts. A restaurant apple pie is processed which means it contains preservatives with extra refined sugar and far less nutritious with more "empty" calories; therefore, it would be classified as a "bad" carb.

Complex sugars, sometimes called "good" carbs, take the body longer to break down and include bread, pasta, rice, beans, starchy vegetables, milk, and yogurt. A fresh apple is a good source of carbs because it is full of vitamins, minerals, and enzymes.

Many myths exist about carbs that make eating a healthy diet complicated.

## Myth #1: All carbs are the same.

Simple sugars are used by the body more quickly and raise blood sugar at a faster rate. Complex sugars are normally recommended because the amount you can eat is more satisfying than the same amount of simple carbs.

## Myth #2: If it's not sweet, it doesn't have carbohydrates.

There are many foods containing carbs that are not sweet. These include starches such as bread, pasta, rice, potatoes, corn, peas, flour, milk, plain yogurt, chips, and crackers.

## Myth #3: If it's white, it has carbs.

There are many white foods that are very low in carbs such as cauliflower and cabbage. However, there are many foods that are not white but are high in carbs: peas, corn, sweet potatoes, and brown whole grain products.

## Myth #4: Sugar causes diabetes.

The main risk factors for Type 2 diabetes include a family history of diabetes, a diet high in calories, having cardiovascular diseases, being overweight, and/or an inactive lifestyle. Because their cells are resistant to insulin, which is a carrier of sugar from the blood to cells, Type 2 diabetics are prone to sugar building up in their blood. Diabetics need to monitor their carb intake to maintain stable blood sugar levels. Sugar does not lead to diabetes; but, diabetes leads to high blood sugar.

## Myth #5: Natural sugar (like honey) is better than white sugar.

Sugar is sugar. Your body will absorb the same amount of glucose regardless of the type of sugar. For a healthier sugar substitute, replace sugar with an artificial and calorie-free sweetener.

## Myth #6: Whole grain products have fewer carbs than white products.

Whole grain products, such as brown rice and 100 percent whole wheat bread, are recommended because they are higher in fiber than their white or refined counterparts. However, a cup of



Army Veteran Ben Saenz discusses the difference between simple sugars and complex sugars with Dietetic Intern Jennifer Spear. If you want to learn more about healthy diet options, speak with a registered dietitian at 713-791-1414, ext. 6616/4295.

brown rice will still have the same amount of carbs as a cup of white rice. But, a diet high in fiber helps lower cholesterol and maintains regularity. Yet, it does not reduce the amount of carbs in a product.

## Myth #7: Carbs cause weight gain.

There are three main nutrients that contain calories: fat, protein, and carbs.

When more calories are consumed than are used by your body for fuel, you gain weight. When you want to lose weight, make sure you have a balanced diet containing all three nutrients and include exercise into your daily routine. Carbs do not cause weight gain unless they are the reason for excess calorie intake.

For more information on portion control, exercise, and weight loss tips, visit [www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov). To talk with a registered dietitian, call 713-792-1414, ext. 6616/4295/3976. ☆ Jennifer Spear, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern

## Veterans are never alone . . . Support Groups are Available

### Amputee Support Group

Meets 4th Wednesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Dining Room. Facilitators: Stacy Flynn, 713-794-7819 & Rosa Lane-Smith, 713-791-1414, ext. 4034

### Breast Cancer Survivors' Support Group

Meets last Tuesday every month, noon, Cancer Center Family Room 4C-365. Facilitators: Magdalena S. Ramirez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5289 & Gail Menchaca, 713-791-1414, ext. 3936

### Cancer Support Group

Meets 3rd Tuesday every month, 1-2 p.m., Cancer Center Family Room 4C-345. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

### Cardiac ICD Support Group

Meets 3rd Friday of every Month, 2 p.m., 3rd Floor Cardiology Department Patient Education Room. Facilitator: Regina Bell, 713-794-7363

### Depression & Bipolar Support Group for Veterans

Meets every Wednesday, 7 p.m., Homeless Domiciliary, 7329 Fannin Street, Facilitator: Anthony Morris, 713-791-1414, ext. 2323

### Liver Transplant Support Group

Meets every Tuesday 3 p.m., Room 5B-166, Facilitator: Juleena Masters, 713-791-1414, ext. 6286

### Lung Cancer Support Group

Meets 1st Tuesday every month, 1:30 p.m., Cancer Center Family Room 4C-365. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

### MOVE! Weight Management Support Group

Meets 1st and 3rd Friday every month, 9 a.m., Room 4C-122. Facilitator: Alicia Merritt, 713-791-1414, ext. 6166/3976

Talk to the Social Worker in Your Clinic or on Your Unit for more information.

### Parkinson's Disease Education & Support Group

Contact facilitator for more information: Shawna Johnson, 713-794-8410

### Prostate Cancer Support Group

Meets 3rd Thursday every month, 1-2 p.m., Cancer Center Conference Room 4C-345. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

### Stroke Support Group

Meets 3rd Tuesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Day Room, Room 2B-210. Facilitators: Kathryn Kertz, 713-791-1414, ext. 4192 & Laura Lawhon, 713-794-7814

### Vet-to-Vet Support & Education Group

Meets every Wednesday, 6 p.m., Room 6B-118; every Thursday, 9 a.m., 6B-117; and every Thursday, 11 a.m., Room 6C-167. Veteran facilitator. info: Cristy Gamez-Galka, 713-791-1414, ext. 4378

Michael E. DeBakey  
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# Life-saving Device Gives Veteran New Lease on Life

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disease, pulmonary hypertension, and atrial flutter," said Biykem Bozkurt, M.D., Ph.D., MEDVAMC Cardiology chief and professor of Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM). "We were able to offer him this life-saving device, and he was ready to go home within a week."

Aortic valve stenosis is an age-related disease caused by calcium deposits in the valve that cause it to narrow and stiffen. As it becomes harder to pump the blood out to the rest of the body, the heart weakens. Patients experience fainting, chest pain, heart failure, irregular heart rhythms, and cardiac arrest. Without treatment, symptomatic patients usually die within two years. It affects approximately 300,000 Americans.

Many older or sicker patients suffering from aortic valve stenosis are considered poor candidates for conventional surgery, which requires cutting open the chest and temporarily stopping the heart.

"With the aging population, the potential impact of this procedure is enormous," said Faisal Bakaeen, M.D., chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the MEDVAMC and associate professor of Surgery at BCM. "People can literally gain a new lease on life overnight."

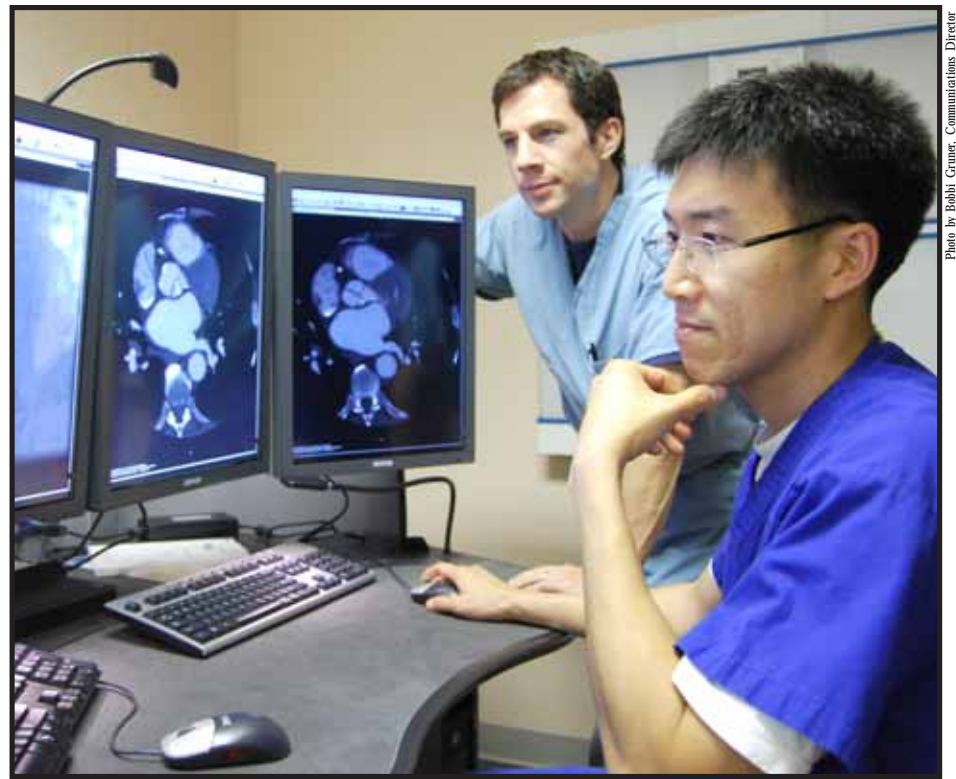
"Before this operation, I couldn't take a shower without giving out. I could not breathe; just pitiful," said Pardue. "My doctor at the Monroe VA Clinic shipped me to the Overton Brooks VA Medical Center in Shreveport. After some tests, they said I was in worse shape than they thought, and I needed to go to Houston in a hurry."

The valve, made of bovine tissue and stainless steel, is about the width of a pencil when it is deployed through a catheter in the femoral artery in the groin. Once it arrives at the correct spot, the valve is released, replacing the diseased one. Patients generally stay in the hospital for an average of three days, compared to seven days with open heart surgery, Bakaeen said.

"Surgeons, cardiologists, and radiologists are part of a whole team unified for this one disease process," said Bozkurt. "There is very little tissue trauma and in experienced hands, it can take approximately 60 minutes."

"Today, I feel renewed. These doctors and nurses gave me my life back – they are the best there is," said Pardue, who is now looking forward to cooking his famous vegetable soup with okra, growing tomatoes using a secret technique, and maybe, doing some bass fishing.

Besides Bozkurt and Bakaeen, the



Radiologist Jin Kim, M.D. (seated) reviews World War II Veteran Guy Pardue's cardiac CT scans with Radiologist Corey Jensen, M.D. to determine if Pardue is a suitable surgical candidate for the Sapien artificial heart valve.

MEDVAMC Heart Valve Team is a multidisciplinary team that also includes Cardiothoracic Surgeon Loraine Cornwell, M.D.; Cardiologists Biswajit Kar, M.D., David Paniagua, M.D., Hani Jneid, M.D., Alvin Blaustein, M.D., and Glenn Levin, M.D.; Vascular Surgeons Panagiotis Kougias, M.D. and Carlos Bechara, M.D.; Anesthesiologist Prasad Atluri, M.D.; Radiologist Corey Jensen, M.D.; Radiologist Jin Kim, M.D.; Nursing Coordinator Maryrose Ruma; and other nursing and auxiliary staff. All are specially trained to take care of this unique and complex patient population.

"It was immediately apparent that this VA medical center had the teamwork to make this program work

and to be successful," said Blase A. Carabello, M.D., the Medical Care Line executive and vice chair of the Department of Medicine at BCM. "Everyone from nurses and rehabilitation specialists to imaging technicians and housekeepers focus on the health and well-being of the patient."

"This new technology could add years to the lives of our patients," said Samir S. Awad, M.D., Operative Care Line executive at the MEDVAMC and associate professor of Surgery at BCM. "We are proud the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center has some of the best doctors and nurses in the country and offers the latest, minimally invasive alternatives for our Veterans." ☆

## New Hospital Wing to House Bigger Urology and Dermatology Clinics

(continued from page 1)

prostate cancer than the general population.

"We strive to continuously improve access to health care for our Nation's heroes," said Bryan T. Bayley, M.H.A., F.A.C.H.E., acting medical center director. "We are excited to soon have enhanced facilities for Veterans who need medical treatment for dermatology and urology issues."

The new wing, located on the second floor of the hospital, will be approximately 22,000 square-feet. Each new clinic will be about 8,000 square-feet.

The new Urology Clinic will have six exam rooms and four rooms intended for procedures and treatment; the Dermatology Clinic, eight exam rooms, four procedure rooms, two laser rooms,

and one light therapy room. The remaining space on the wing will be used to expand the nearby Prosthetics Department.

The project will be completed in two phases. The first phase will encompass the structure and outer walls. The second phase focuses on the interior with finished walls and utilities. The estimated completion date is September 2013.

When vacated, the current space occupied by the Urology Clinic and Dermatology Clinic will be used to expand the hospital's surgical operating suite and primary care, respectively.

In the last ten years, outpatient visits to the VA hospital in Houston have more than doubled. The new wing is yet another demonstration of MEDVAMC's commitment to provide the best care available anywhere to Veterans. ☆ *Rebecca Echols, Communications Office Intern*

## Changes to Beneficiary Travel Pay

Beginning July 1, 2012, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) and its outpatient clinics will transition to a new way of processing travel reimbursement claims. Except for rare exceptions, Veterans will be reimbursed for beneficiary travel using Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) to a checking or savings account. During the transition period, Jul. 1 – Sep. 30, 2012, Veterans will still be able to receive cash payments at the Agent Cashier Offices.

Benefits of the new EFT method include streamlining the travel claim process, improving tracking claims, cutting down on long lines at the Agent Cashier, and making your VA visits more convenient.

### How do I start my EFT Payments?

Complete a form available from the Agent Cashier Office. Once you have a checking or savings account, and your EFT has been established, you can expect to receive reimbursement in 3 to 5 days from the date your claim was submitted to the MEDVAMC.

### How will EFT affect me?

You should make sure you have sufficient funds for your travel to and from your VA appointment since immediate cash reimbursement will no longer be an option.

### Will this affect the outpatient clinics?

The Agent Cashier Offices at the Beaumont and Lufkin outpatient clinics will close permanently on Sep. 30, 2012.

### Who can I call if I have questions or need help?

For more information, contact the Agent Cashier at 713-794-7498.





# Veterans' Questions

**Answers provided by the Patient Advocates in Consumer Affairs (713) 794-7884 or e-mail [vhahousegeneralquestions@va.gov](mailto:vhahousegeneralquestions@va.gov)**

## Q: Can I email my doctor?

**A:** Yes. With secure messaging through VA's My HealtheVet website, patients can contact their physician and health care team and communicate with them about any health-related questions or concerns.

Patients can also request lab and test results, receive a doctor's explanation, renewals of medications, consultations, and appointments. Gaining access to secure messaging is easy.

First, enroll in My HealtheVet by

going to [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) and click on register. Print and complete the form to get an IPA (In-Person Authentication). Bring the form to any VA medical facility to be verified by a qualified VA staff member.

## Q: I believe my husband needs help with some readjustment issues. Can someone help me figure out how to talk to him about this?

**A:** VA now offers a free Telephone Call Center, "Coaching Into Care," which provides assistance to family members and friends trying to encourage their Veteran to seek health care for possible readjustment and mental health issues.

The "Coaching Into Care" service offers free coaching to callers, with no limit to the number of calls they can make. The goal of these sessions is to connect a Veteran with VA care with the help and encouragement of family members or friends. Callers will be coached on solving specific logistical problems and ways to encourage the Veteran to seek care while respecting his or her right to make personal decisions.

The Telephone Call Center is available toll-free at 1-888-823-7458, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, and online at [www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching).

## Q: When will the new outpatient clinics in Katy and Tomball open?

**A:** Late January 2013 is the estimated construction completion date by both clinic contractors. After inspections and resolutions of punch list items, VA's estimated acceptance of each of the buildings will take place in February. In March and April, VA will install medical equipment, computers, telephones, furniture, radiology equipment, and audiology rooms. The Katy VA Outpatient Clinic and the Tomball VA Outpatient Clinic are both expected to open in early summer 2013.

## Q: Why did the Outpatient Pharmacy stop doing refills at the Window?

**A:** The Outpatient Pharmacy at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center filled almost 2,000 prescriptions at its window every day. Many of these were for routine refills and non-urgent medications; consequently, creating long wait times for Veterans who had critical medication needs, were being discharged from the hospital, or were seen in the emergency room.

In an effort to reduce unacceptable, long waits for urgent medication needs, the Outpatient Pharmacy no longer

accepts routine prescription refill requests or fill new, non-emergency medications at its window. Refills and non-urgent medications are mailed to Veterans.

The Outpatient Pharmacy does make exceptions for emergency situations on a case-by-case basis. This might include a Veteran who has run out of critical medications such as insulin or blood pressure medications.

To help solve this problem and to avoid running out of medicine, Veterans are urged to order their next refill as soon as they receive a delivery.

Use VA's MyHealtheVet website at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov). It is fast, easy, convenient, and secure.

To obtain a new prescription when no refills are left, Veterans must speak with their health care provider or contact the 24-hour VA Telecare Center at 713-794-8985 or toll-free 1-800-639-5137.

## Q: How do I get more news about the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and Veterans' health care?

**A:** Send an e-mail to [bobbie.gruner@va.gov](mailto:bobbie.gruner@va.gov) to sign up to receive news releases and information. You can also visit [www.houston.va.gov](http://www.houston.va.gov), like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter.

## Important VA Telephone Numbers

Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center .....	713-791-1414
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278
VA Network Telecare Center .....	713-794-8985
	toll-free 1-800-639-5137
Beaumont VA Outpatient Clinic .....	409-981-8550
	toll-free 1-800-833-7734
Conroe VA Outpatient Clinic .....	936-522-4000
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 1949
Galveston VA Outpatient Clinic .....	409-761-3200
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12600
Lufkin - Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic .....	936-671-4300
	toll-free 1-800-209-3120
Lake Jackson VA Outpatient Clinic .....	979-230-4852
Richmond VA Outpatient Clinic .....	832-595-7700
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12800
Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic .....	409-986-2900
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12900
Pharmacy Refills .....	713-794-7648
	toll-free 1-800-454-1062 or <a href="http://www.myhealth.va.gov">www.myhealth.va.gov</a>
Veterans Crisis Line .....	toll-free 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Caregiver Support Hotline .....	toll-free 1-855-260-3274
Appointment Center .....	toll-free 1-800-639-5137
Automated Appointment Information .....	713-794-7648
	toll-free 1-800-454-1062
VA Eligibility & Enrollment .....	713-794-7288
Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program .....	713-794-7848
Homeless Veterans Drop-In Center (1418 Preston St.) .....	713-794-7533
Hotline for Homeless Veterans .....	toll-free 1-877-4AID VET

## Assistance for Returning Troops from Iraq/Afghanistan

Team Members .....	713-794-7034/8825/7928
Vet Center (701 N. Post Oak Road) .....	713-682-2288
Vet Center (2990 Richmond Ave.) .....	713-523-0884
Vet Center (14300 Cornerstone Village Dr.) .....	713-578-4002
Vet Center (990 IH 10 North, Ste. 180, Beaumont) ...	409-981-8576

## Patient Advocates

Houston/Lake Jackson .....	713-794-7884
Beaumont .....	1-800-833-7734, ext. 113
Conroe .....	936-522-4010, ext. 1952
Galveston/Texas City .....	713-791-1414, ext. 6586
Lufkin .....	936-671-4362
Richmond .....	832-595-7700

Houston VA National Cemetery .....	281-447-8686
Houston VA Regional Office .....	713-383-1999
	toll-free 1-800-827-1000

## "Mental Health is Good Medicine" Wellness Fair and Short Seminars



**Friday, October 12, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.**  
**4th Floor Auditorium**

*Open to all Veterans, Family Members, Employees & Visitors*

## Wellness Fair: 9 a.m. - noon

Information Booths, Giveaways, On-site Experts,  
**FREE Kolaches and Coffee, & More!**

## Short Seminars with Q&A

**FREE Ice Cream!**

**1:00 pm "5 Ways Not to Lose Your Mind:  
Is It Just Daily Stress or Something More?"**  
by Laura Marsh, M.D., Mental Health Care Executive

**1:30 pm "From the Streets to Sitting in the Boss' Seat"**  
by Oliver Avery, Former Homeless Veteran

**2:00 pm "Mental Health Medications -  
The Patient Friendly Ones Only!"**  
by Rayan Al Jurdi, M.D., MEDVAMC Psychiatrist

**2:30 pm "ABCs of VA Psychotherapy"**  
by Tracey Leone-Smith, Ph.D.

**For more information, contact Gary Brown at 713-791-1414, ext. 6313.**